



TO: West Virginia Healthcare Providers, Hospitals and Other Healthcare Facilities

FROM: Matthew Christiansen, MD, MPH - Commissioner and State Health Officer
West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources, Bureau for Public Health

DATE: September 15, 2023

LOCAL HEALTH DEPARTMENTS: Please distribute to community health providers, hospital-based physicians, infection control preventionists, laboratory directors and other applicable partners.

OTHER RECIPIENTS: Please distribute to association members, staff, etc.

On September 11, 2023, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved and provided emergency use authorizations (EUAs) for updated COVID-19 vaccines formulated to more closely target the currently circulating variant and to provide better protection against serious consequences of COVID-19, including hospitalization and death. Following the regulatory action, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) issued recommendations for everyone 6 months and older to get an updated COVID-19 shot to protect against the potentially serious outcomes of COVID-19 illness this Fall and Winter.

COVID-19 continues to be a major cause of serious respiratory illness in West Virginia. COVID-19 has been one of the leading causes of mortality among West Virginians, with over 8,000 deaths reported since 2020. Vaccination is the most effective tool to protect your patients from severe illness.

As the virus that causes COVID-19 is always changing, and protection from COVID-19 vaccines declines over time, our current prevention strategy is to align COVID-19 vaccines more closely with the currently circulating variant (Omicron XBB.1.5.) of the virus, much as annual influenza vaccines are designed. We anticipate that the composition of the COVID-19 vaccine may need to be updated annually, as is done with the seasonal influenza vaccine.

Additionally, as the public health emergency came to an end earlier this year, the COVID-19 vaccines have started to transition to a more traditional mode of delivery. Most West Virginians can still get a COVID-19 vaccine for free. For individuals with health insurance, most plans will cover COVID-19 vaccine costs. People who do not have health insurance or with health plans that do not cover the cost can get a free vaccine from their local Community Health Center (also known as federally qualified health centers or FQHCs), local health department, and pharmacies participating in the [CDC Bridge Access Program](#). Children eligible for the Vaccines for Children (VFC) program will also be able to receive the vaccine from a VFC provider.

Details about the updated COVID-19 shots follow.

This message was directly distributed by the West Virginia Bureau for Public Health to local health departments and professional associations. Receiving entities are responsible for further disseminating the information as appropriate to the target audience.

Categories of Health Alert messages:

Health Alert: Conveys the highest level of importance. Warrants immediate action or attention.

Health Advisory: Provides important information for a specific incident or situation. May not require immediate action.

Health Update: Provides updated information regarding an incident or situation. Unlikely to require immediate action.

Summary of Recommendations

- Individuals **ages 5 years and older** regardless of previous vaccination are eligible to receive a single dose of an updated mRNA COVID-19 vaccine at least 2 months since the last dose of any COVID-19 vaccine.
- Individuals **ages 6 months through 4 years** who have previously been vaccinated against COVID-19 are eligible to receive one or two doses of an updated mRNA COVID-19 (timing and number of doses to administer depends on the previous COVID-19 vaccine received).
- Unvaccinated individuals **ages 6 months through 4 years** are eligible to receive 3 doses of the updated authorized Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine or two doses of the updated authorized Moderna COVID-19 vaccine.
- People who are moderately or severely immunocompromised are eligible for at least one dose of an updated 2023-2024 COVID-19 vaccine at least 2 months since the last dose of any COVID-19 vaccine, and they may receive additional doses of the 2023-2024 COVID-19 vaccine thereafter in consultation with their healthcare provider.
- The **bivalent (Omicron)** Moderna and Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccines are **no longer authorized** for use in the United States.

Newly Approved Vaccines

Comirnaty (COVID-19 Vaccine, mRNA) to include the 2023-2024 formula, and a change to a single dose for individuals 12 years of age and older.

- For prescribing information see [Factsheet for Comirnaty](#).

Spikevax (COVID-19 Vaccine, mRNA) to include the 2023-2024 formula, a change to a single dose for individuals 18 years of age and older, and approval of a single dose for individuals 12 through 17 years of age.

- For prescribing information see [Provider Factsheet for Spikevax](#).
- [Patient and Caregiver Factsheet](#).

Moderna COVID-19 Vaccine for emergency use in individuals 6 months through 11 years of age to include the 2023-2024 formula and lower the age eligibility for receipt of a single dose from 6 years to 5 years of age. Additional doses are also authorized for certain immunocompromised individuals ages 6 months through 11 years, as described in the fact sheets.

- For prescribing information see [Provider Factsheet for Moderna](#).
- [Patient and Caregiver Factsheet](#).

Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 Vaccine for emergency use in individuals 6 months through 11 years of age to include the 2023-2024 formula. Additional doses are also authorized for certain immunocompromised individuals ages 6 months through 11 years, as described in the fact sheets.

- For prescribing information see [Provider Factsheet for Pfizer-BioNTech](#).
- [Patient and Caregiver Factsheet](#).

Bivalent mRNA Disposal and Reporting

As of September 12, 2023, CDC no longer authorizes the use of bivalent (Omicron) mRNA COVID-19 vaccine, as all mRNA COVID-19 vaccination is now with the updated (monovalent) formulation. To minimize the risk of administration error, providers should:

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- Remove all bivalent (Omicron) mRNA vaccine from storage units immediately, even if they are not expired.
- Once all inventory is fully accounted for, remove bivalent (Omicron) mRNA COVID-19 vaccine from the vaccine inventory in the West Virginia Statewide Immunization Information System (WVSIIS).
- Dispose of all bivalent (Omicron) mRNA COVID-19 vaccine vials in accordance with local, state, and federal regulations.
- Report all disposed inventory as wastage.

Other Considerations

- “Monovalent” is a term not easily understood or recognized by the general public. Instead, **“Updated COVID-19 Shot” or “Seasonal COVID-19 Shot” is commonly used and better understood.** Consider using more common language (i.e., seasonal, updated) and referring to “shots” or “vaccination” (rather than vaccine) when discussing options with patients.
- The [CDC’s Interim Clinical Considerations](#) for the Use of COVID-19 Vaccines and related resources will be updated in the near future. As more official clinical guidance resources become available, state resources such as the WV COVID-19 Vaccination Due Date Calculator and FAQs on [vaccinate.wv.gov](https://www.vaccinate.wv.gov) and the [WV COVID-19 Messaging Kit](#) will also be updated/provided.
- For questions regarding the ordering or administration of the vaccine, please call the Division of Immunization Services at (304) 558-2188.

Resources

- FDA Press Release: <https://www.fda.gov/news-events/press-announcements/fda-takes-action-updated-mrna-covid-19-vaccines-better-protect-against-currently-circulating>.
- CDC Press Release: <https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2023/p0912-COVID-19-Vaccine.html>.

For questions about this health alert, contact the Office of Epidemiology and Prevention Services, Division of Infectious Disease Epidemiology (DIDE) at (304) 558-5358 ext. 2.

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